that the assumption of this role by the maternal uncle was only one of several non-patriarchal features introduced into the Monguor system as a result of contact with matriarchal systems. Third, that the property, assistance, and respect relationships which existed between a brother and his sister and her children, as described above, were not specific to either the patriarchal or matriarchal systems, but were founded in human nature, in conditions common to both systems. Fourth, I would add that normally the sister and her children are respected and loved in the husband's family and go through life happily—more because the two families are really friendly and intimate than because of the maternal uncle's power to intervene. After all, the solid foundation of families is not fear and hatred but love, and the functions of the maternal uncle must be viewed with not only his emergency powers in mind, but this as well.

THE CHILD

Among the Monguors, as in most societies in Asia, boys are preferred to girls. The description given by Father J. Van Oost of the favoritism shown toward boys among the Mongols of the Ordos might well have been written of the Monguors:

> He is surrounded with a kind of idolatry. His parents are proud of him; they cater to all his whims; they rush to dry his tears. A mother is always ready to suckle her son whenever he seems to want it, whether it be night or day. He is a petty tyrant who knows how to make himself obeyed, and his mother carries him around on her back when she is doing her household work. . . . If he gets sick, there is a major crisis. They think he is the victim of evil spirits. They resort to superstitious practices and go to fetch a lama who makes divinations, conjures away the spirits and prescribes remedies and talismans.[23]

When a woman is pregnant the whole village knows about it, and all of the women and girls are eagerly interested. Every soothsayer passing through the village is invited to foretell the sex of the expected child, and all the young wives ask him to foretell also when they themselves may expect a similar blessed event. When a pregnant woman enters a doorway and steps over the threshold, the other women always watch to see which foot she puts forward first. They believe that if she regularly steps over a threshold with the right foot, the child will be a boy; if it is the left foot, it will be a girl. This is because they believe that a son lies on the left side of the womb and a daughter on the right; accordingly, if the left side is heavy the mother will instinctively raise her right foot when making a step upward.[23a]

The festivities for the birth of a first son are especially important, and among the ways of propitiating fate to provide a long life, the selection of a lucky name is particularly important. Matters of such importance in the

[23] Van Oost, *Au pays des Ortos*, as cited, 102.

[23a] Compare the Mongol expression *kul kundu*, "leg-heavy," for "pregnant."—O. L.

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society are naturally reflected in popular religion. Special deities in the lama monasteries are supposed to be interested in these affairs of mankind. The Monguors often invite lamas to help them with prayers, make vows to go on pilgrimages to far distant monasteries if they are granted a son, and give alms lavishly. Their religious interpretation is that lack of sons is a punishment for sins of the parents in previous incarnations. The condition of a childless woman is pitiable—she is always despondent and dejected and drags out a miserable existence. Not having a son means having no stake in the family and society in which she lives. Her life is lonely, for it is not easy for a childless woman to make friends. I have often had a mother come to me with her childless daughter-in-law, kneeling, weeping, and begging for medicine that will make the girl bear a child, repeating over and over again "Father, the ancestors will have no one to sacrifice to them, the family will have no posterity." Such pitiful scenes gave me an understanding of the social outlook of the people among whom I lived; I could even understand why they indulged in polygamy.

Childlessness is not common among the Monguors, however. On the contrary, a Monguor woman will frequently have six or more surviving children—an astonishingly large number, considering the great amount of hard work that the mother has to do and the fact that, owing to ignorance of the most elementary rules of hygiene, lack of doctors, and miscarriages, fully a third of the children die in early infancy. The Monguors are in fact much more prolific than their kinsmen who are still nomads. One reason for this may be the fact that they live in houses while the children of nomads living in tents are more exposed to variations of temperature. Probably a more important reason is that there is less venereal disease among the Monguors than among nomads. The lamas, most of whom are promiscuous in spite of their vows, and great carriers of venereal disease, have less opportunity to indulge themselves in the crowded and public dwellings of the Monguors than they do among the scattered tents of the nomads.[24] The neighboring Tibetans have a very high opinion of the prolificness of the Monguors. When they are childless, they prefer to adopt a Monguor boy rather than one of their own stock, and they like to marry Monguor girls because they bear more children. The Monguors have no objection to giving a girl to a Tibetan family, especially if it is a rich family.

[24] In view of the fact that venereal disease is much less common, and families much larger, among the settled agricultural Mongols of southern and eastern Inner Mongolia than among the nomad Mongols, it is also probable that the transition from nomadism to agriculture among the Monguors has led to a stricter morality. When land becomes the principal form of property, the man who owns land wants to make sure that the son who inherits it is his legitimate son, whereas among pastoral Mongols a son, regardless of legitimacy, is a new herdsman, making it possible to look after an increased number of stock.—O. L.

/The Monguors/

first son is an occasion for great rejoicing. Various rituals are performed in connection with the name-giving, and the announcement of the birth to the grandparents on both sides. Everyone in the village is invited to a party, and relatives and friends bring gifts for the baby.

The birth of daughters and younger sons requires less elaborate celebration. Invitations are sent to the child's maternal uncles to be present at the name-giving ceremony, which is performed by the grandfather. It is thought that a woman's brothers have a powerful influence over the family into which her child is born, and therefore they must be notified properly.

Poor families also celebrate the birth of the first son, although the ceremonies are less elaborate. If the family cannot afford the expense of a feast, rich people of the village often help them. It is not right to allow the birth of a first son to go uncelebrated, for he is the new link in the ancestral chain, and it is he who will grow up to make the sacrifices to the clan ancestor, an important concern to the Mongours.

j. Beard-growing

A man may start to grow a beard on the first day of the first or second moon of the new year after his thirtieth birthday, but only if his parents are dead. He must not grow a beard while his parents are alive, as it would remind his parents of their advanced age and approaching death.

k. Wedding, funeral and grave

The customs surrounding weddings, funerals and the construction of graves are almost the same among the Mongours as those practiced in traditional China. Their burial, however, is unique. Under the influence of Lama Buddhism, it has become the general custom of the Mongours to cremate their dead. The funeral rites are carried out by lamas. In the olden days, however, the T'u-ssu and the nobles were always buried.

4. Popular beliefs

Because of the importance of having a son, the pregnant woman is full of hopeful expectation. Everyone in the village knows about the coming event, and is interested in the sex of the child. It is believed that a male child lies on the left side of the womb, a female child on the right. The pregnant woman is watched carefully when she enters a doorway. If she steps over the threshold with her right foot, she is thought to be carrying a boy; if with her left foot, a girl. The logic behind this notion is that a boy makes the left side heavier than the right, so the mother will instinctively raise her right foot to make a step upward.

If several children in a family have died in infancy, the head of a family blessed with many children will be invited to name a newborn child, in the hope that some of his good luck may pass on the luckless family.